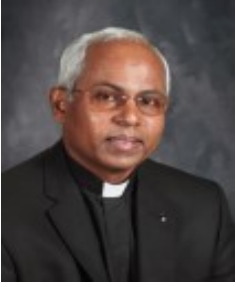


# A Message From Fr. Francis



My Dear Friends In Christ!

A blind man was invited to attend a wedding. The young couple were being married in a village church well known for its architecture and its beautiful grounds. The guests were commenting on all of this at the reception afterwards and how they were struck by how well the church, the grounds and the setting all looked. When the blind man heard all this he thought to himself, “But didn’t they hear the bell?” For him, the church bell that pealed to welcome the bride and groom had been magnificent. The air was filled with its vibrating jubilation. He was amazed at the atmosphere of joy and celebration the bell had created for the occasion. Everyone else seemed to have missed that element. Although he could not see, perhaps because he could not see, his hearing was very alert. He heard the beauty that others missed. The sounds that passed others by touched him very deeply.

Today’s gospel is the story of a blind man, a blind beggar. Although he was blind, his hearing was very sensitive, so he *heard* that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Although he could not see Jesus, he made contact with him through his sense of hearing. His finely tuned hearing to the presence of Jesus led him to using another sense to make contact with Jesus, his sense of speech. He cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” Even when people around Jesus, including perhaps some of Jesus’ disciples, told him to keep quiet, he shouted all the louder, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Even though he could not see Jesus, he was determined to make contact with him through his gift of speech, through his urgent prayer from his heart. His prayer was an act of faith on his part. He recognized Jesus as ‘Son of David’ which was one of the titles for the Messiah, and trusting that Jesus could heal his blindness. His making contact through his hearing and his speaking revealed that he had an inner sight. Even though he was blind, he saw Jesus with the eyes of faith. Even when he was rebuked by the crowd for confessing his faith out loud, he refused to be silenced. He had the courage to keep professing his faith, in spite of the hostility and scorn it brought upon him.

This man’s faith literally brought Jesus to a standstill, in spite of the fact that at this point in his ministry he was hurrying from Jericho to Jerusalem. The gospel says simply, “Jesus stopped.” Jesus’ response to the heartfelt prayers of this man was in complete contrast to that of the people around him. Rather than telling him to keep quiet, Jesus told those around him to call him over. Jesus is portrayed as the champion of those not considered worthy enough to come near to God. Again we witness the extraordinary responsiveness of this man to Jesus’ presence, to the call of Jesus. When he heard that Jesus was calling him, he first of all threw off his cloak. His cloak, no doubt, served many purposes. He sheltered him from the weather; it was his bed; it was in a sense his home. Yet, he abandoned it, and having done so, he jumped up and went faithfully to Jesus in his blindness. Nothing was going to hold him back from connecting with Jesus, not even his precious cloak. He speaks to all of us of our own need to free ourselves of the binds that stifle our faith and keep us from approaching the Lord.

The question that Jesus asked that man when they came face to face was not the kind of dismissive question that comes from annoyance at being interrupted, “What do you want?” Rather, it was a very personal question “What do you want me to do for you?” It is a question that we can all hear as addressed to each of us personally, and how we answer that question can reveal a great deal about who we are and what we value. In the passage in Mark’s gospel which immediately preceded this one, Jesus asked that same question of two of his own disciples, James and John, “What do you want me to do for you?” Their answer revealed a self-centered ambition, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” The blind man’s answer to Jesus’ question revealed a very different heart. Aware of his blindness, aware of his disability, he asked simply, “Master, let me see again.” In answering his prayer, Jesus addressed him as a man of faith, “your faith has saved you.” He was already seeing Jesus with the eyes of faith before he received back his physical sight. Once he received back his physical sight, we are told that he followed Jesus along the road. He immediately used his newly restored sight to walk after Jesus as a disciple up to the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus would be crucified. His faith had shaped his hearing and his speaking, and now it shaped the path he would take. Like him, we are blind beggars who need to keep crying out to the Lord who passes by, so that we can see him more clearly and follow him more nearly.

**See you at Mass!**  
**Fr. Francis**

